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ABSTRACT

The power of beauty has been contemplated by writers, poets, and philosophers for centuries. The link between the target physical attractiveness and perceived social influence effectiveness has not been directly and systematically investigated. The goal of this study was to assess whether physically attractive (versus unattractive) individuals are perceived as possessing different amounts and types of interpersonal power. Data was collected from 87 male and 139 female undergraduates. A questionnaire examined social-influence related impressions of the target, and three hypothesized mediating variables in the physical attractiveness-social influence relationship, including interpersonal attraction, identification, and social skills. This study extended previous research on the physical attractiveness stereotype into the domain of perceived interpersonal power. Correspondingly, the obtained results extended the conclusion "what is beautiful is good" to "what is beautiful is good--at getting others to do what he wants." The moderate inferential relationship between physical attractiveness and social influence effectiveness obtained in the present investigation is consistent with historical and anecdotal "evidence" that suggested that the power of beauty does exist. Identification with, and more strongly, perceptions of the targets' social skills were found to mediate the perceived link between looks and social influence effectiveness. (ABL)

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The Perceived Relationship Between Physical Attractiveness and Social Influence Effectiveness

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The Power of Beauty has been contemplated by writers, poets, and philosophers for centuries. From Shakespeare and Santayana to folklore and fairy tales, beauty has been recognized as a source of power (e.g., Helen of Troy's face had the power to "launch a thousand ships" [Marlowe, 1981]). In addition to literary or historical "evidence" of a link between looks and power, there seems to be a consensual awareness in our present-day culture that physical attractiveness is a social influence asset. In areas ranging from politics to advertising, there is an over-representation of physically attractive people. This abundance of anecdotal evidence suggests that a strong perceived relationship exists between good looks and social influence effectiveness, and, that this strong anticipated relationship should be reflected in the social scientific research literature. This, however, is not the case.

Although a large body of research exists on the physical attractiveness stereotype (cf. Adams, 1982; Alley & Hildebrandt, 1988; Berscheid, 1981; Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Bull & Rumsey, 1988; Dion, 1981, 1986; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Patzer, 1985), and two recent meta-analytic reviews of this literature (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Feingold, 1992) have revealed that a moderate inferential relationship exists between good looks and inferences of interpersonal potency (e.g., assertive, independent), the link between target physical attractiveness and perceived social influence effectiveness has not been directly and systematically investigated. That is, the current literature does not address whether attractive people are expected to be "good at getting others to do what they want." The primary goal of the present investigation is to address this gap in the physical attractiveness stereotype literature by assessing whether physically attractive (versus unattractive) individuals are perceived as possessing different amounts and types (i.e., Persuasion, Compliance, and Conformity) of interpersonal power. These three domains of social influence were selected because, although different reviewers and social influence investigators carve up the general topic of social influence in slightly different ways, these three areas appear to be the most commonly mentioned and investigated (e.g., Becker, 1986; Chaiken, 1986; Eagly, 1983; McGuire, 1985; Moscovici, 1985). A secondary goal of this research is to explore three possible mediating variables in the perceived link between looks and social influence effectiveness: Interpersonal Attraction, Identification, and Social Skills.

Predictions

The first two predictions pertain to the primary goal of the study (i.e., extending physical

attractiveness stereotype research into the domain of interpersonal power). It is hypothesized that: (**A1**) Participants will attribute greater social influence ability to attractive influence agents than unattractive agents, and (**A2**) attractive targets will receive higher ratings of persuasive, compliance-obtaining, and conformity-obtaining influence effectiveness than their unattractive counterparts. The following predictions, which address the secondary goal of the investigation, are made regarding the three suggested mediators of the perceived looks-social influence relationship: (**B1**) Social Skills: It is predicted that physical attractiveness will be significantly correlated with perceptions of social skills. The strong link between good looks and perceptions of social competence obtained in Eagly et al.'s (1991) and Feingold's (1992) meta-analyses, along with the suggestion by several investigators (e.g., Bassili, 1981; Dion, 1981, 1986) that the core of the attractiveness stereotype is "social goodness" implies that this will be a strong relationship. (**B2**) Identification: Because it is likely that many potential influencees desire to be like attractive others, and because physical attractiveness research has revealed that individuals think they are more similar to attractive than average (or unattractive) agents or models (e.g., Cavior & Dokecki, 1972), it is likely that target attractiveness will be significantly correlated with a measure of Identification with the target person. (**B3**) Interpersonal Attraction: Target attractiveness will be significantly linked to scores assessing liking for the target person. There is abundant research indicating that attractive (vs unattractive) people are liked more as friends (e.g., Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968) and dates (e.g., Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottmann, 1966). (**B4**) It is predicted that Interpersonal Attraction, Identification, and perceived Social Skills will mediate the perceived attractiveness-social influence relationship. That is, this relationship will be attenuated when these three mediators are separately statistically controlled for.

Method

Subjects:

The data were collected from 87 male and 139 female Rutgers University undergraduates who received partial course credit for their participation.

Design and Procedure:

A 2 (sex of subject) x 2 (target attractiveness) x 2 (target sex) design was used. The procedure was identical to Dion, Berscheid, and Walster's (1972) classic study on the physical attractiveness

stereotype. Attractive and unattractive male and female stimulus photographs (25 in each condition) were identified in an extensive preliminary study that began with a sample of 4,500 photos from 5 yearbooks from universities across the U.S. Participants were run in large mixed-sex groups in half-hour sessions. As each subject entered the research laboratory (s)he was handed a folder containing a cover letter, an index card with a target person's photograph, and a questionnaire. The cover letter indicated that the study was concerned with first impression accuracy and depicted the photographed individual as a participant in an ongoing personality study at another university (presumably allowing the researchers to compare participants' "first impression" judgments with "actual" data obtained from the photographed individual).

The questionnaire contained 58 9-point rating scales, 8 of which tapped social-influence related impressions of the target. More specifically, two items assessed perceived overall social influence ability (e.g., "Good at getting others to do what [s]he wants"). Six items (2 for each domain) assessed each of the three different types (i.e., Persuasion, Compliance, and Conformity) of social influence (e.g., "Persuasive"). The questionnaire also contained 24 items tapping each of the three hypothesized mediating variables in the physical attractiveness-social influence relationship: (1.) Interpersonal Attraction (3 items; including Byrne's [1961; Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; Byrne & Nelson, 1965] 2-item Interpersonal Attraction subscale), (2.) Identification (4 items), and (3.) Social Skills (14 items, including a subscale of Dion et al.'s [1972] Social Desirability Index).

Results:

Before addressing the pedictions, it is important to determine whether the scales developed in the present study to assess (1) social influence effectiveness and (2) the mediating variables were reliable. 1. The two items assessing perceived general social influence effectiveness were correlated $r=.63$ ($p<.0001$) so they were combined into a two-item scale (SIEGEN). The two questions assessing perceived persuasive ability and perceived compliance-attaining ability were also significantly correlated ($r=.75$, $p<.0001$ for persuasion; $r=.66$, $p<.0001$ for compliance) so they were combined into the 2-item scales PERSUADE and COMPLY, respectively. The two items that were designed to measure perceived conformity-attaining ability (i.e., "Others follow his/her lead in situations that are vague" and "Often imitated by peers") were uncorrelated ($r=.06$). This is most likely because the item "Often imitated by peers" was interpreted in a derogatory manner (i.e., "Often

mocked by peers") rather than as a reference to modeling a target's behavior. Therefore, only the former item was used in further analyses. (2) The scales assessing the hypothesized mediating variables were more internally consistent. The three Interpersonal Attraction items were combined to form one scale because the coefficient alpha was .89. A coefficeint alpha of .91 for the four-item Identification scale indicated it was internally consistent, and the 14 items assessing Social Skills had a coefficient alpha of .98.

To address the major goal of the investigation, four 2 (subject sex) x 2 (target sex) x 2 (target attractiveness) ANOVAs were conducted with the two-item scale scores on general social influence effectiveness (SIEGEN), persuasive (PERSUADE), and compliance (COMPLY) scales, as well as the single conformity (CONFORM) item, as the dependent measures. In each ANOVA, all possible interactions were specified. As indicated in Table 1, all four models were significant beyond the .01 probability level with E values (7, 218 df) ranging from 3.52 (CONFORM) to 10.58 (COMPLY). Each model also obtained a significant main effect of target attractiveness (all ps <.001). That is, good (vs bad) looks significantly impacted scores on the SIEGEN, PERSUADE, CONFORM, AND COMPLY scales. Post hoc comparisons of group means provide strong support for predictions A1 and A2. That is, attractive (versus unattractive) individuals were perceived as significantly better at influencing others in general, and more specifically, at persuading others, attaining compliance, and attaining conformity.

Zero-order and partial correlations were calculated to address the secondary goal of the study. As predicted (hypotheses B1-B3), target attractiveness was found to be significantly correlated with all three hypothesized mediating variables: The lowest correlation was between physical attractiveness and the interpersonal attraction scale (r=.23, p<.001); The correlations between looks and Identification (r=.38, p<.0001) and attractiveness and perceived social skills (r=.53, p<.0001) were much larger. Table 2 presents the correlational data pertaining to the mediating impact of these three variables in the perceived physical attractiveness-social influence relationship. More specifically, the first column of data in the Table indicates the zero-order correlations between target attractiveness and scores on the SIEGEN, PERSUADE, COMPLY, and CONFORM scales. These correlations range from r=.24 (p<.001) for CONFORM to r=.40 (p<.0001) for SIEGEN. Data columns 2-4 contain the partial r's when scores on each of the three mediating variable scales were separately partialled out of

correlations between target attractiveness and each of the four social influence scales indicated above. As the partial r's in the second data column indicate, when scores on the perceived Social Skills scale are statistically controlled for, the correlations between attractiveness and all four social influence scales are dramatically reduced. Controlling for Identification also attenuates the zero-order correlations. Contrary to prediction, however, Interpersonal Attraction scores were not found to mediate the relationship between attractiveness and perceived ability to influence others. Thus, only partial support was obtained for prediction B4.

Conclusions:

This investigation extends previous research on the physical attractiveness stereotype into the domain of perceived interpersonal power. Correspondingly, the obtained results extend the oft-cited conclusion "what is beautiful is good" to "what is beautiful is good -at getting others to do what (s)he wants" (both in general, and in three specific domains of social influence). The moderate inferential relationship between physical attractiveness and social influence effectiveness obtained in the present investigation is consistent with historical and anecdotal "evidence" that suggested that (at least in peoples' perceptions) the power of beauty does exist. The stereotype data obtained herein are also consistent with recent empirical reviews of the physical attractiveness stereotype literature in which effect sizes of similar magnitude were obtained for conceptually similar domains of inference. More specifically, Feingold (1992) obtained a mean weighted effect size (d) of .54 for the Dominance effect category which included perceptions of targets' dominance, assertiveness, and ascendancy, and Eagly et al. (1991) obtained a d of .49 for their Interpersonal Potency content domain which contains attributes such as assertive, demanding, and independent. On the other hand, the fact that the types of dependent variables assessed in the present investigation were distinct from those in previous studies (e.g., even if they are conceptually similar, the perception of "assertiveness" is not the same thing as thinking that a target person is good at influencing others), and a moderate correlation (r=.40) between looks and expected social influence ability was obtained suggests that future research on the physical attractiveness stereotype should be even further extended to inferential domains not yet assessed.

In terms of variables that may mediate the perceived relationship between looks and social influence effectiveness, both Identification with, and more strongly, perceptions of the targets' Social Skills were found to mediate the perceived link between looks and social influence effectiveness.

Interpersonal Attraction, however, did not mediate this perceived association. Although participants did like attractive targets more than their unattractive counterparts, and interpersonal attraction scores are significantly correlated with perceptions of social influence effectiveness (r's between interpersonal attraction and social influence scales range from .24 for PERSUADE to .49 for COMPLY), it is clear that interpersonal attraction is not the variable that underlies this perceived association. It is probable that this variable will play a larger mediational role in the actual relationship between influence agent attractiveness and influence effectiveness. More specifically, it has been suggested that the actual looks-influence relationship exists because "people generally agree with people they like" (Chaiken, 1980) or because it is reinforcing to agree with people you like (e.g., Mills & Aronson, 1965). Consequently, future research should assess whether reality reflects perceptions of the relationship between physical attractiveness and social influence effectiveness.

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Table 1.
Differences in Perceptions of Attractive vs Unattractive Targets' Social Influence Ability

Social Influence Variable	ANOVA Model F-value[1]	Target Physical Attractiveness F-value	Attractive Group Mean	Unattractive Group Mean	Overall Mean and Range
General Social Influence Effectiveness (SIEGEN)	8.56****	44.93****	11.52	8.40	9.95 (2-18)
Persuasive Ability (PERSUADE)	9.65****	40.01****	11.88	8.94	10.40 (2-18)
Compliance Attaining Ability (COMPLY)	10.58****	43.10****	11.17	8.69	9.92 (2-16)
Conformity Attaining Ability (CONFORM)[2]	3.52**	13.58***	5.56	4.58	5.07 (1-9)

*.05 **.01 ***.001 ****.0001

Note 1: All ANOVAs were 2 (participant sex) x 2 (photo sex) x 2 (photo attractiveness) where all possible interactions were specified.
Note 2: Perceived Conformity-Attaining Ability was assessed with one item. SIEGEN, PERSUADE, & COMPLY were 2 item scales.

Table 2.
The Mediating Impact of Interpersonal Attraction, Identification, and Expected Social Skills in the Perceived Relationship Between Physical Attractiveness and Social Influence Effectiveness

Social Influence Variable	Zero-Order Correlations: Physical Attractiveness	Partial Correlations Between Physical Attractiveness and Social Influence Effectiveness: With Social Skills Partialled Out	With Identification Partialled Out	With Interpersonal Attraction Partialled Out
General Social Influence Effectiveness (SIEGEN)	.40****	.15*	.27****	.36**.*
Persuasive Ability (PERSUADE)	.37****	.14*	.26****	.34****
Compliance Attaining Ability (COMPLY)	.38****	.12	.24***	.32****
Conformity Attaining Ability (CONFORM)	.24***	-.01	.09	.18**

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*.05
**.01
***.001
****.0001